

**ABUSE PREVENTION POLICY FOR CHILDREN
AND VULNERABLE ADULTS
FOR CONFERENCE AND DISTRICT MINISTRIES OF
THE ILLINOIS GREAT RIVERS CONFERENCE
OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

Introduction

Jesus said, “Whoever welcomes one such child . . . welcomes me” (Matthew 18:5 CEB). Children are our present and our future, our hope, our teachers, our inspiration. They are full participants in the life of the church and in the realm of God.

Jesus also said, “As for whoever causes these little ones who believe in me to trip and fall into sin, it would be better for them to have a huge stone hung around their necks and be drowned in the bottom of the lake” (Matthew 18:6 CEB). Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to the little ones, the children. The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church state that “children must be protected from economic, physical, emotional, and sexual exploitation and abuse” (§162C). . . .

God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and ritual abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong. (From *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church – 2012*, p. 240.)

Thus, we adopt this policy for reducing the risk of abuse of children and vulnerable adults in the ministries and activities of the Illinois Great Rivers Conference.

Scope

This policy and its provisions shall apply to all staff and volunteers, clergy or lay, who have contact with children under the age of 18 or vulnerable adults in conference and district sponsored events. This policy does not supersede the responsibility of local churches to develop and implement their own policies for the prevention of abuse to children and vulnerable adults.

Purpose

Our conference’s purpose for establishing this Abuse Prevention Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our strong and unwavering commitment to the safety and spiritual growth of all of our children and vulnerable adults.

Statement of Covenant

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist Annual Conference, we pledge to engage in the ministry of the Gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all of our children and vulnerable adults as well as all who work with them. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events; we will educate all of our workers with children and vulnerable adults regarding the use of appropriate policies and methods; we will have a clearly defined procedure, conforming to the requirements of Illinois law, for reporting a suspected incident of abuse; and we will be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs.

Conclusion

In all of our ministries with children and vulnerable adults, this conference is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ. “We will surround *each other* with a community of love and forgiveness . . . that *we* may be true disciples who walk in the way that leads to life.” (Adapted from “Baptismal Covenant I,” *United Methodist Hymnal*, p. 35.)

Definitions

Abuse is generally categorized in five primary forms, defined below: physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and ritual abuse. (*Safe Sanctuaries*, p. 29)

- **Physical Abuse** is any deliberate act that inflicts bodily harm to a person.
- **Emotional Abuse** is abuse in which a person exposes another person to spoken and/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty. Emotional abuse sends a message to the other person that he or she is worthless, bad, unloved, and undeserving of love and care. Youth exposed to emotional abuse may have experienced being deprived of all parental affection, being locked in closets or other confining spaces, being incessantly told they are bad, or being forced to abuse alcohol or illegal drugs. This type of abuse is difficult to prove and is devastating to the victim. (*Safe Sanctuaries*, p.61)
- **Neglect** is failure to provide the proper or necessary nourishment or medically indicated treatment or other care necessary for well-being, including adequate food, clothing and shelter; or a child who is abandoned by his or her parents or other person responsible for the child's welfare without a proper plan of care. (Adapted from 325 ILCS 5/3)
- **Sexual Abuse** is abuse in which sexual contact between a child and an adult (or other older and more powerful youth) occurs. Examples may include fondling, intercourse, incest, and the exploitation of and exposure to child pornography or prostitution. (*Safe Sanctuaries*, p. 30)
- **Ritual Abuse** is abuse in which physical, sexual, or psychological violations of a child are inflicted regularly, intentionally, and in a stylized way by a person or persons responsible for the child's welfare. The abuser may appeal to some higher authority or power to justify the abuse. (*Safe Sanctuaries*, p. 30)

Bullying is a form of emotional abuse. It involves intentional, repeated, hurtful acts, words, or other behavior on the part of one or more other individuals. Among children (or youth), bullying may be physical (hitting, or damaging possessions), verbal (name-calling or taunting), emotional (threatening or stalking), or social (spreading rumors or the imposition of isolation). In adults, bullying manifests itself primarily through ongoing harassment and psychological intimidation that happens when one is ridiculed, insulted, degraded, threatened, or slandered. Bullying will not be tolerated by the Illinois Great Rivers Conference.

Children are any persons “under the age of 18 years, unless legally emancipated by reason of marriage or entry into a branch of the United States armed services.” (325 ILCS 5/3) For the purposes of this policy and accompanying procedures, teens typically labeled “youth” are included in the term “children” as defined by the State of Illinois.

Conference means the Illinois Great Rivers Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Event is defined as a conference or district sponsored activity or ministry that involves a gathering of children or vulnerable adults.

Participants are children under the age of 18 who are registered, enrolled, attending or otherwise participating in an event or activity sponsored by the conference or a district. Participants are also persons who are considered to be vulnerable adults.

Social media includes various forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking) through which users share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos or pictures). A few examples of social media are Facebook, GroupMe, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, Twitter, and Tumblr (and new forms are constantly being developed).

Staff includes any paid employee of the conference or district and any paid employee of any group, committee, team or agency of the conference or district who has been charged with the care and supervision of participants at an event.

Supervision is the ability for a person to be in charge of a group of children or vulnerable adults, giving direction, setting boundaries, disciplining appropriately, maintaining safety and being the responsible leader in all situations.

Volunteer is any non-staff worker who has been charged with the care and supervision of participants at an event.

Vulnerable Adults are persons 18 years of age and older with physical, mental, and/or developmental disabilities.

Procedures

Preface

The procedures outlined below shall serve as minimum standards for all conference and district sponsored events in which participants include children under the age of 18 or vulnerable adults. Various conference entities, such as Camping and Retreat Ministries, may develop procedures specifically related to events sponsored by that entity so long as they contain provisions to meet all the procedures outlined below.

Selection and Recruitment of Workers

Four-Years-Older Rule: All volunteers and staff supervising children under 18 will be at least four years older than the oldest participant. Youth age 14-17 and young adults who do not meet the four-years-older rule may serve as staff/volunteers once they have completed training, provided that they serve under the supervision of one or more adults who do meet the four-years-older rule. No one under 18 and no one who does not meet the four-years-older rule will be given sole responsibility for a group of children.

Criminal Background Checks: Prior to beginning service, each prospective staff member or volunteer must complete an application form and an authorization for criminal background check. All criminal background checks for volunteers and staff of district and conference events must be run through the conference office. Criminal background checks for volunteers and seasonal or single-event staff will be repeated annually. The conference, in its discretion, may allow a person to serve as a volunteer whose local church presents on the person's behalf evidence of a criminal background check generated within the previous twelve months.

Operational Procedures

Two Adult Rule: During all district and conference events, one adult staff or volunteer will not be alone with a child or vulnerable adult. For small group activities in which one adult staff or volunteer supervises each group, groups are to meet in open areas, ideally in sight or sound of another group. At no time will a child or vulnerable adult participant be left unsupervised during an event.

Open Door Rule: All district and conference activities with children under 18 or vulnerable adults shall be held in open areas or rooms with windows in the doors. Where this is not possible, doors should be left open. Safety gates or similar measures may be necessary to protect young children's safety where doors must be left open. Where it is necessary for a participant to speak privately with a staff

member or volunteer, such conversations should take place in an open area in sight of others. Where this is not possible, a second adult should be alerted to monitor the conversation.

Social Media: Any social media group set up in the name of a conference camp, youth event, or other ministry shall have at least two adult staff/volunteer administrators. Social media communication, texting, or other electronic communication between staff/volunteers and children under 18 should be confined to public posts or copied to another adult leader and/or the participant's parent. Staff/volunteers will not post photos or personal information regarding participants under 18 years of age (to whom they are not related) on a personal social media page or website, even with permission.

Special Situations: When individuals under 18 years of age attend an event not designed for children or youth (or unexpectedly accompany an adult to an event designed for adults), then those in charge of the event cannot be expected to have had screening of volunteers or staff or appropriate supervision requirements established, nor can they be expected to assume responsibility for such attendees.

Training

The group (board, agency, committee, team, etc.) hosting each conference or district event is responsible for training and orientation of staff and volunteers. No individual will be allowed to serve until he/she has completed the appropriate training. Staff and volunteers for any conference-sponsored event will receive training which will include this policy and accompanying procedures along with site- or event-specific procedures. Before beginning service, each staff member and volunteer will sign a statement that they have read, understand, and agree to abide by this policy and accompanying procedures.

Reporting Suspected Incidents

Mandated Reporting: The State of Illinois Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act requires "any person who came to know the child through an official capacity or position of trust, including but not limited to health care professionals, educational personnel, recreational supervisors, members of the clergy, and volunteers or support personnel in any setting where children may be subject to abuse or neglect" to report observed or suspected child abuse to the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS).

It is enough to have "reasonable cause" to suspect child abuse. DCFS and not an IGRC supervisor will determine if the information given by the reporter meets the legal requirements to initiate an investigation.

Procedure for Reporting Child Abuse: If and when a volunteer or staff person suspects child abuse, whether committed by another volunteer or staff person or by someone else in the child's life, he/she must report that suspicion immediately to his/her supervisor (or supervisor's supervisor), or the person in charge of the event. The supervisor will provide to the volunteer or staff person DCFS contact information and a list of questions DCFS will ask when the call is made (see below). The volunteer or staff person who suspects the abuse makes the call.

The information DCFS needs includes:

- Names, birth dates (or approximate ages), races, genders, etc. for all adult and child subjects.
- Addresses for all victims and perpetrators, including current location.
- Information about the siblings or other family members, if available.
- Specific information about the abusive incident or the circumstances contributing to risk of harm—for example, when the incident occurred, the extent of the injuries, how the child says it happened, and any other pertinent information.
- If this information is not readily available, the reporter still should not delay a call to the hotline. The Child Abuse Hotline is 800-25-ABUSE or 800-252-2873.

Reporting Policy Violations: If you witness a violation of this policy, please report it to the person in charge of the event, his/her staff, supervisor, Director, District Superintendent, or the Area Office. Contact information can be found at the conference website (www.igrc.org).

Honest and good faith complaints are welcomed. The conference, including the aforementioned persons, will not retaliate against any person who brings forward a complaint. Prompt and appropriate investigation and corrective action will be taken.

After Care: Following any report of incident within a district or conference event, the person in charge of the event shall work with conference staff, the District Superintendent, and/or the local church to provide ongoing support and care for all involved.

Media Inquiries

Should a staff member or volunteer of any district or conference event be contacted by the media for comment on any alleged violation of this policy involving IGRC or The United Methodist Church, that staff member or volunteer should direct the media person to the Director of Communications. No other staff member or volunteer is authorized to speak on behalf of the conference or district.

This Abuse Prevention Policy and accompanying definitions and procedures will be reviewed at least once per quadrennium. Responsibility for ensuring this review rests with the Bishop's Resource Team on Relational Ethics in partnership with the Area Office/Assistant to the Bishop.